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## Context and Organization: Situating Antonio Negri's *Factory of Strategy* in the Contemporary Debate on the Party Form

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**ABSTRACT** This paper begins by observing a tension in contemporary political discourse on the left: against a backdrop of social movements that prioritize "horizontal" organizational structures, there has been a renewed academic debate on the relevance of Lenin and the party form. In this paper I look at Antonio Negri's recently translated *Factory of Strategy: Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin* (a work based on a collection of lectures originally delivered by Negri in the 1970s). I suggest that Negri's intervention can make a significant contribution to this debate, one that—without rejecting the Leninist project as such—reframes what it would mean to appropriate Lenin for today. By focusing on Lenin's method of political analysis rather than his specific form of organization, I argue that Negri recovers from within Lenin's writing a set of categories that can themselves provide the terms for a critique of contemporary Leninism. For Negri, this entails showing how Lenin's system contains the means by which to theorize its own supersession. In presenting a theory of political intervention that is able to reflexively analyze its historical conditions of possibility, I suggest that Negri's work on Lenin embodies several important theoretical and methodological commitments. This paper's concluding section looks at recent work by Jodi Dean and critically interprets her endorsement of the party form in light of Negri's intervention.

It is useful to begin by observing a tension in contemporary political discourse. On one hand, the last several years have seen an upsurge in social movements built around organizational forms that emphasize horizontality, inclusivity, and direct democracy. These movements (Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter are perhaps the most prominent examples in the North American context) have often consciously opposed traditional forms of political mediation, defining themselves in part by their autonomy from those institutions that have historically been called upon to represent the demands of progressive social movements, including political parties, trade unions, and non-governmental organizations. On the other hand, however, we can observe an emergent countertendency. In the aftermath of these struggles there have been a number of calls for the movements to abandon their organizational experiments and to assume more traditional models of political leadership and representation. These calls have been diverse in content, ranging from endorsements of the Democratic Party to appeals for a renewed emphasis on Leninist style party building—it is this latter tendency that I address in the current paper. Thus against a backdrop of social movements that have prioritized "horizontal" organizational forms there has emerged a renewed debate on the contemporary relevance of Lenin and the Leninist conception of the party, a conception that in certain respects runs counter to the radically democratic initiatives that were the centerpiece of this most recent cycle of struggles.<sup>1</sup> In what follows I look at how we ought to think about these recent endorsements of Lenin's party model, and how they relate to broader questions about movement organization and leadership. Drawing primarily upon Antonio Negri's work from the 1970's, as well as more general reflections on the tradition of Italian "autonomist Marxism," I survey a particular approach to evaluating the relevance of the party form. This paper can, therefore, be understood as a reflection on

method. It is an attempt to clarify a certain means by which to approach the problem of the party, as well as organizational questions more broadly.

The thesis developed here is ultimately a simple one: the Leninist party should be viewed as a historically specific form of political organization, one that cannot be unproblematically transferred out of its initial context. This is an idea I explicate primarily via a reading of Antonio Negri's recently translated work on Lenin, first published in English in 2014 under the title *Factory of Strategy: Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin*. Although based on a series of lectures delivered by Negri in the early 1970's (and originally published in Italian in 1978), this work has not previously been available in English, and has yet to feature prominently in recent North American debates on Lenin's work.<sup>2</sup>

My goal in what follows is to use Negri's reflections on Lenin in a twofold manner. First, I aim to situate Negri's interpretation within contemporary debates on the party by elaborating the unique features of his writing on this question. Second, I hope to explicate the broader theoretical architecture that supports the "autonomist" account of organization (an account that informs Negri's work), paying specific attention to the concept of "class composition."

There are two further points that should be mentioned at the outset. First, in this paper I focus primarily on a mode of theoretical analysis, one that is applied to the party, as well as to organizational questions more generally. I present several categories for carrying out such an analysis and offer a general schema for relating these categories. Given this, the current paper is more theoretical than it is empirical. Nonetheless, the central claims outlined here are, at least in principle, subject to empirical verification (and any fuller development of this project would require such verification). Second, in interpreting Negri's work and its relation to the autonomist tradition, I rely largely on older sources. Negri's recent writing—much of it produced in collaboration with Michael Hardt—has found a broad readership and its main conclusions (for example, about "empire," the "multitude," and "immaterial labor") have been widely commented upon. Thus, while there exists a large literature (both in cultural studies and beyond) analyzing these works, somewhat less has been written on their theoretical origins, and less still looking at the complex relation between these origins and debates around the party form.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first reviews a representative sample of contemporary literature discussing the party form and its relation to Marxian politics. The subsequent three sections focus on Negri and the autonomist tradition, while the final section looks at competing perspectives. Of the sections on Negri's work, the first explores his interpretive strategy in reading Lenin, and follows him in his exposition of several Leninist concepts. The next section takes a wider perspective, situating Negri's approach within the Italian autonomist tradition, paying specific attention to how the framework of 'class composition' informs his view on organization and the party. In the final section on Negri, I highlight key features of Lenin's context and briefly follow Negri in his suggestion that the context-specific features that once established the political adequacy of the party have been superseded. This paper's concluding section turns to recent work by Jodi Dean and critically interprets her endorsement of the party in light of Negri's intervention. Dean is perhaps the central reference point in contemporary North American debates on the party form. Her writing offers a rigorous and wide-ranging defense of the party and of its adequacy to the present. Paying specific attention to their differing methods for approaching organizational questions (and not simply the differing content of their proposals), I outline the most salient points of contrast between Negri and Dean. While I defend the merits of Negri's approach, I propose no settlement to the contemporary debate on Lenin and the party. My hope instead is that this intervention

may help clarify the terrain of disagreement, as well as elucidate methods for analyzing the problem of organization.

### ***Mapping the contemporary discussion***

A number of recent interventions have taken up the question of the party form and its relation to the current conjuncture. Often responding to a global cycle of struggle that includes the Arab Spring, the anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe, and the various occupations of public space that followed in the wake of the financial crisis, these interventions have tended to weigh party-building strategies against the perceived failure of these movements to sustain themselves by creating durable organizational structures.

Beyond this political context, several prominent publications have been key touchstones in the renaissance of academic work on the party. Discussions from the “Idea of Communism” conference and subsequent book series have been important reference points in the English-language debate, as have Bruno Bosteels’s *The Actuality of Communism* and Jodi Dean’s *The Communist Horizon*, as well as her more recent *Crowds and Party*.<sup>3</sup> While these works address many facets of contemporary anti-capitalist struggles, responses to the organizational question have been among the most contentious. An exhaustive survey of the debate they have prompted is well beyond the scope of the current paper. Some recent contributions are, however, worth mentioning as they help to situate the works I address in what follows.

One recurring question in this discussion pertains to the continued utility of the party in the face of changes in the structural features of global capital. Positions on this question may, at the broadest level, be divided into three groups: (1) those that suggest historical changes have rendered the party form inadequate to contemporary needs, (2) those that suggest historical changes have not fundamentally undermined the adequacy of the party, and (3) those that ground the necessity of the party in some non-historical feature of social or political life, and thus see the question of its relevance as fundamentally underdetermined by historical considerations. (There is, we may note in passing, a fourth possible position which holds, in a partial reversal of the third, that there are non-historical features of social life that render the party form always *inadequate*. Although I will say nothing about them here, many anarchist critiques proceed in this manner, suggesting, in essence, that the forms of political instrumentality, representation, and centralism endemic to parties are always counter to the aim of overcoming social domination.)

Against what he sees as the “common sense” perception that the party form has been “exhausted,” Gavin Walker argues for a re-evaluation of the “party-idea.”<sup>4</sup> Although he is hesitant to endorse a specific organizational model — and is skeptical of any dogmatic repetition of some historical form of the party — he ultimately offers a positive evaluation of the party on the following grounds: “The party-form is itself an insistence on the necessity of an affirmative and ruptural concept of politics, against the various tendencies that emphasize the spontaneous generation of politics from within the contemporary development of capitalism itself.”<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on the party as a necessary vehicle of political antagonism is a common refrain in contemporary endorsements of the party form. These endorsements frequently contend that the spontaneous character of contemporary movements renders them too diffuse and ephemeral to challenge existing structures of political and economic power.

Walker’s ultimate endorsement of the party draws its theoretical support from Alain Badiou’s work, particularly Badiou’s insistence in *Theory of the Subject* that “the party is the body of politics.” As Jason Smith has noted, however, Walker’s reading of Badiou strongly discounts the latter’s more recent suggestion that the party form has been

“saturated” and is thus inadequate to our needs in the current conjuncture.<sup>6</sup> With Walker, Dean, and others, Smith acknowledges the limitations of “horizontalist” models, arguing that contemporary movements must find mechanisms to both deepen the content of their demands and produce more consistent modes of coordination. He, however, stops short of endorsing a return to party building strategies. Whatever the specific conclusion reached, the crucial factor for Smith is that “the very posing of the question of the party-form can only take place with reference to, and indeed from within the dynamics of, contemporary struggles.”<sup>7</sup> Thus in a clear rebuke to ahistorical conceptions of the political, such as those found in Žižek’s work (as well as in the early Badiou), Smith rejects all *a priori* theories of the party.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere Smith argues for a reevaluation of the political form of the commune (with the Paris Commune functioning as a privileged referent). The goal, as he writes, is to theorize “a conception of the commune as a form of organization that is a unit neither of administration nor of production: it is the name for a collective mode of existence in which the separation between the economic and the political, between living and struggling tends to disappear. And perhaps with it, the need and push for the party.”<sup>9</sup>

Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav echo this imperative to ground any consideration of the party form within the historical contours of the present, as do Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson.<sup>10</sup> Both sets of authors note that the contemporary geographical distribution of capital (especially the disaggregation of industrial production through a growing reliance on global supply chain networks) has altered the composition of the contemporary working class in ways that challenge the adequacy of inherited party models. Clover and Benanav point to the deindustrialization of economies in the Global North as a crucial sign of a changing working class, and then take up the question of whether something like the traditional industrial proletariat may be found in the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russian, India, China, and South Africa). Although they observe a slight increase in the percentage of the workforce involved in industrial manufacturing within these countries, they emphasize that “patterns of peripheral industrialization have not replicated those of the core.”<sup>11</sup> Clover and Benanav thus conclude “The collective experience of work and life that gave rise to the vanguard party during the era of industrialization has passed away with industrialization itself.”<sup>12</sup>

Mezzadra and Neilson invoke similar concerns. Although they echo Jodi Dean’s skepticism regarding the utility of horizontalism and “micro-politics,” they claim that the party’s statist orientation limits its horizon of historical effectivity. Under conditions of globally diffuse value production, they argue, “the state is not powerful enough to confront contemporary capitalism; in order to reopen politically a perspective of radical transformation, something else, a different source of power, is absolutely necessary.”<sup>13</sup>

One difficulty in the current debate is the ambiguity that is frequently attached to the notion of the “party form.” In certain instances it is invoked in the broadest sense to describe all left-leaning party formations, in others it is used more narrowly to describe Lenin’s party model, and in others still it is used to name the wider set of historical experiences associated with both the “Bolshevized” Communist Parties of the Third International, as well as later Maoist inspired groups. In light of this ambiguity, there is a great deal of work to be done disentangling these various histories and their relation to the contemporary debate. Although he does not specifically disambiguate these broader meanings, Peter Thomas usefully describes some of the diversity within modern theorizations of the party by tracing different approaches to the concept in the work of Lukács, Gramsci, and among the Italian autonomists. While Thomas suggests a party formation is necessary to advance the aims of contemporary social movements (and ultimately champions a rethinking of the Gramscian model), his work is perhaps most

useful for gesturing towards the wide range of possible instantiations of the party form. Thomas's intervention is further welcome for its insistence that the Italian autonomists have been too quickly — and indeed wrongly — categorized as anti-organizationalists. By recalling that the party question was actively debated among the Italian New Left, Thomson opens theoretical space for what is to follow.<sup>14</sup>

### ***How to read Lenin: Negri's methodological considerations***

While Negri has come to be strongly associated with a critique of the party form, his lectures are by no means a straightforward refutation of Lenin's theoretical insights (many of which he defends quite enthusiastically). It is thus useful to begin with a note on how he reads Lenin's work. Here we might provisionally describe Negri's reading as a Leninist critique of Leninism. That is, rather than read Lenin in relation to some transhistorical normative criterion and then, on this basis, offer an ethico-political critique of the party form, Negri engages Lenin in order to recover, from within Lenin's own writing, categories that can themselves provide the terms for a critical contextualization of Leninism. Negri's reading, then, has two characteristic features that are worth highlighting: (1) it resists applying an external standard to Lenin's work, opting instead to show how his system already contains the categories by which to theorize its own supersession; (2) it emphasizes historical discontinuity, foregrounding the temporal gap that separates Lenin from the contemporary conjuncture. Critically, the second is carried out with terms derived from the first. The historical discontinuity that separates Lenin's time from ours is theorized (at least in part) with categories of historical analysis derived from within Lenin's writing.

For Negri, the choice to read Lenin in this way is not arbitrary. It is instead a theoretically informed method of reading that, he suggests, follows from a Marxist commitment to historical specification. Thus he writes at the outset of his study, "one of the most salient aspects of Marxist discourse on Marxism is the assumption of its own essential discontinuity and the discontinuity of its real referent."<sup>15</sup> And as he later clarifies, "only by recognizing the shifts, leaps, and discontinuity that worker's theory is forced to confront can we call ourselves Leninist and use Leninist models of organization."<sup>16</sup>

Negri's task, therefore, is to conceptualize historical discontinuity in Leninist terms. He finds several means to do this, but perhaps most significant among them—especially in the first third of his study—is the concept of a "determinate social formation," which Negri locates in Lenin's early writing on Russian economic development.<sup>17</sup> This category delimits a concrete sphere of historical analysis, the specificity of which must be read in distinction to other more abstract and historically general categories in Marxist theory, such as a "mode of production." While the latter marks discontinuities within a long expanse of historical time, allowing one, for example, to distinguish between a feudal and capitalist mode of production, it effectively fixes (through abstraction) a set of productive relations that are understood to remain more or less invariant for extended historical periods. It has, in this respect, an ideal character and therefore doesn't immediately correspond with, or describe, an actually existing society.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, the notion of a "determinant social formation" registers spatiotemporal discontinuities within and between modes of production, forcing us to continually analyze how productive relations are concretely articulated in a given time and place.<sup>19</sup> In a social formation elements of different historical modes of production may be combined and co-present — albeit always in uneven ways. We can thus observe that in pre-revolutionary Russia elements of feudal modes of agricultural production existed alongside modern industry and wage labor, as well as small-scale forms of pre-industrial manufacturing. Crucially, this combined presence does not negate the proposition that one form of

production is dominant and at the leading edge of economic development within the social formation. On Negri's reading, part of the Leninist method involves isolating this dominant tendency as a primary point of political intervention.<sup>20</sup>

While the 'determinant social formation' becomes significant in Negri's text, the mere introduction of such a category is not sufficient to establish what is unique in Lenin's method. It establishes a category of historical analysis, but not a concrete means for viewing and reconstructing the actual historical situation, much less for formulating strategic considerations adequate to it. Negri is clear, then, that Lenin's innovation involved a second component: an insistence on analyzing the determinate social formation from the viewpoint of a revolutionary subject. Thus Negri continues, "we are Leninists insofar as from within our contemporary determinate situation we affirm a class standpoint geared toward subversion."<sup>21</sup>

It is, however, vital for Negri that this class standpoint and its subversive capacity not be reified. Affirmation of the class standpoint is not bought at the expense of a commitment to historical specificity. The subjective coordinates of the class are not external to the social formation, but are themselves historically variable and, therefore, must be analyzed in terms of their specificity within it. As Negri writes, "in Lenin...the crucial problem is that of the determinacy of the revolutionary subject *and its temporal and spatial constitution*."<sup>22</sup> Even more insistently on the next page Negri warns that: "the continuity of the subversive subject elected as its referent by Marxist science must reckon with the discontinuity of the determination of the subject and the dialectical variation of the material forms it takes."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the Leninist method requires us not only to evaluate the historical discontinuity of objective conditions, but also the subjective discontinuity (itself equally historical) of the class and its political expressions. To capture these methodological imperatives, Negri introduces the concept of "class composition" into his study. Although this is a concept more closely associated with Negri's theoretical context than Lenin's, his claim is that it has an implicit presence in Lenin's work. It is thus at this point—in the move from a merely descriptive account of the determinate social formation to the concrete analysis of the subjective forces within it—that we begin to see a more pronounced integration of categories from autonomist Marxism into Negri's work.

### ***Class composition in autonomist Marxism***

The concept of class composition names one of the central theoretical innovations of Italian autonomist Marxism from the 1960's and 70's, and can provisionally be understood to describe the social and political constitution of the working class under a given set of historical conditions. It offers, among other things, a conceptual means for analyzing the specific subjective forms assumed by the class in its dynamic relation to capital. We might thus begin our treatment by echoing Harry Cleaver's observation that while Marxist theoreticians had long taken an interest in the internal composition of capital and its development, they have said less about the elementary practices and social forms that characterize the working class.<sup>24</sup> The autonomist approach reverses this traditional emphasis on capital, shifting attention to the forces that—within a given conjuncture—lend consistency to working class organization and identity, and thus give the class its determinate form.

In many cases (and this is true of Negri's usage), an explicit division is made between the "technical composition" of the class and its "political composition". The former describes the objective contours assumed by the class within the labor process. These may include how class formations are shaped by the temporality of the workday, the application of particular technologies to production, and the managerial regimes that seek to regulate

(both materially and culturally) the modalities of social cooperation that animate production. In contrast, political composition describes the systems of resistance — both organized and spontaneous—that challenge capital’s command over production. Relevant considerations in this regard are also numerous, but include the nature of the organizational forms taken up by the workers’ movement, the particularities of the social demands being made, the level of commitment to inherited institutions—the party, the union, etc.—as well as the prevalence of informal acts of resistance, such as absenteeism and sabotage. As Negri writes, “The political composition of the proletariat is understood as the determination of the needs, compartments, and degrees of political consciousness manifested in the working class as a subject at a given historical conjuncture.”<sup>25</sup>

Two qualifications are essential to round out this description. First, although an analytic separation may be made between technical and political composition, the great innovation of the autonomist approach is to connect these two terms. As a framework for analysis, class composition represents an attempt to grasp the intimacy of these categories—of the technical and the political—in order to demonstrate their complex interaction.<sup>26</sup> To show, in other words, how particular forms of resistance correspond to specific expressions of the labor process (and vice versa). As Steve Wright notes in his history of Italian autonomism, the objective of class composition analysis is to reveal “the relationship between the material structure of the working class, and its behavior as a subject.”<sup>27</sup> On this approach, there is no transhistorical form of political organization (be it the union, the party, the workers’ council, etc.) that will in all instances be adequate to the needs of the class. Emphasized instead are the discrete practices by which class formations are continually recreated through the interplay of their technical and political compositions, emerging in each new iteration with different sets of capacities, demands, and organizational models.<sup>28</sup> As Cleaver suggests, the concept of class composition has “revealed the idealism of those Marxists who treat both the form of capital and the form of working-class organization as eternally given.”<sup>29</sup>

If the first qualification was that this analysis refuses a static dualism between technical and political composition, the second qualification is this: when viewed as a dynamic process, this type of analysis tends to foreground the active power of resistance and its ability to force capital into reorganizing production. That is, it assumes the anteriority of resistance to constituted power and thus inverts many traditional approaches, which take workers’ movements to be purely reactive with respect to capital’s development.<sup>30</sup> Using the terms already introduced, we may therefore suggest that political composition tends to both precede and condition technical composition. It is workers’ initiative in struggle that forces capital to restructure production in order to decompose emergent forms of workers’ power and the organizational networks that support them. From this perspective, then, the history of capital’s development, including the various technological and managerial innovations it has brought to bear on the labor process, can be viewed as responses to the cycles of workers’ struggle that punctuate history.

This insight—that working class resistance precedes and drives forward capitalist development—is central to the wider theoretical architecture of autonomist Marxism. Mario Tronti provides what is perhaps the classic formulation of this idea:

We too have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity, and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle of the working class. At the level of socially developed capital, capitalist development becomes subordinated to working class struggles; it follows behind them, and they set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital’s own reproduction must be tuned. [...] Our new



approach starts from the proposition that, at both national and international level, it is the specific, present, political situation of the working class that both necessitates and directs the given forms of capital's development.<sup>31</sup>

Labor, as Tronti would later frame it, is doubly productive: as labor-power set to work by capital it produces surplus-value, while as an agent of resistance, labor is productive in so far as it drives capital to revolutionize the production process itself. Labor is thus productive "at one time inside capital, and at another against capital."<sup>32</sup>

Several points must be mentioned in order to see the implications of this analysis for Negri's reading of Lenin. To begin, this view implies that we should understand capital as a social relation, rather than merely as an autonomous subject or object (as is the case in many non-Marxian understandings of the category). To suggest that capital is a social relation is in part to recognize that it must include labor within its internal composition, either continually subsuming labor or ceasing to be capital. Labor — when both freed of traditional bonds and without the means to ensure its own reproduction (and thus doubly free in Marx's sense)—is an existence-condition for capital. The contradiction, however, is that in its drive to bring labor into the production process, capital coheres within itself its own antagonist. Thus Tronti writes, "the working class should materially discover itself as a part of capital if it wants to oppose the whole of capital to itself. It must recognize itself as a particular of capital if it wants to present itself as its general antagonist."<sup>33</sup> Capital's need to integrate labor into its composition makes it uniquely vulnerable to working class resistance. Seen in this way, it is the constant specter of being unable to successfully subsume labor-power, and set it to work in the production of surplus value, that pushes capital forward.

This relational view of capital extends to the technical and organizational structure of the production process. These attributes of the labor process are not class neutral, but instead represent the material embodiments of particular strategic efforts made to undermine workers' power and resistance. Technological development—at least as it occurs under capitalism—cannot, therefore, be sufficiently explained either with reference to a transhistorical attribute of the human species (for example, rationality) or with respect to a simple environmental determinate (for example, material scarcity).<sup>34</sup> Instead, technical forms are fundamentally social and historical.<sup>35</sup> As Raniero Panzieri writes in his 1961 essay, *Surplus Value and Planning*, "the relations of production are within the productive forces."<sup>36</sup> This aspect of the autonomist thesis is consistent with Marx's intuition in chapter 15 of *Capital* where he observes, "It would be possible to write a whole history of the inventions made since 1830 for the sole purpose of providing capital with weapons against working-class revolt."<sup>37</sup> For Marx, investments in fixed capital are strategic in that they both reduce the number of workers employed and deskill the labor process, therefore changing the balance of class power in capital's favor.<sup>38</sup>

These comments help to clarify an important point: while, in the autonomist approach, political forms are shaped by the technical structure and organization of the labor process, this framework avoids any reductive variety of technological determinism. Where the latter would suggest a unidirectional model of form-determination in which a technical base determines a social form, this view tends to reverse the explanatory procedure. Effectivity accumulates unevenly on the side of labor and its political constitution, which have both ontological and explanatory priority in this account of capitalist development. Alterations in the technical composition of capital, then, are themselves explained on the basis of discreet instances of social antagonism.

With this theoretical perspective on economic development, a unique historical imaginary emerges. In the autonomist account, historical dynamics are punctuated by three terms:



“composition,” “decomposition,” and “recomposition.”<sup>39</sup> In the first moment, a distinct model of organization arises on the ground of a determinate technical composition of the labor process; this emergent form of political composition challenges the existing regime of production, unsettling capital’s means of valorization. In response to this challenge, capital restructures the labor process, upsetting the material terrain on which the given form of resistance was organized. This change in the technical composition “decomposes” the dominant forms of class organization, temporarily stabilizing accumulation and forcing labor into a process of “recomposition” in which it must re-imagine its tactics, demands, and organizational forms. The autonomists refer to this three-fold movement of composition, decomposition, and recomposition as a “cycle of struggle.”<sup>40</sup> In this, each new period emerges from a crisis in the previous one—from a struggle that fractures the old mode of organization and establishes the imperative for a new form of composition.<sup>41</sup>

With this categorial schema, capitalism is periodized by demarcating a series of discreet moments in the composition of the working class. History appears, then, as a diverse series of relatively stable instances in which certain attributes of the class—a certain technical and political composition—are sedimented and come to predominate within a given national or international milieu. In autonomist writing, these stable states tend to be described in terms of a number of subjective ideal types, or figures, each aiming to capture (albeit at a relatively high level of abstraction) the composition of the class in a given moment.<sup>42</sup> These figures bear titles like the “professional worker” (denoting the archetypal composition of the class in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century); the “mass worker” (the form of composition associated with industrial capital during the Fordist period); and the “social worker” (a figure of workers’ subjectivity—one most closely associated with Antonio Negri’s work in the early 1980s—emerging from a post-Fordist composition of labor). To this list we might add Hardt and Negri’s more recent category of the “multitude,” which, in part, represents a form of political composition emerging within a globalized productive order and rooted in the valorization of “immaterial” labor.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Class composition and the party form***

Having made this detour, one can see more clearly why Negri feels compelled to introduce the category of class composition into Lenin’s system. Class composition unites the emphasis on historical specificity implied by the concept of a “determinate social formation” with a focus on the “determinacy of the revolutionary subject and its temporal and spatial constitution.” It thus synthesizes the two key tenets of Lenin’s thought that were noted above. Negri even comes close to providing a formula for understanding this synthesis when he describes class composition as “determinate social formation with reference to class.”<sup>44</sup>

With these concepts in place, we can follow Negri in subjecting the Leninist political project to the kind of historical critique that, he suggests, Lenin’s own methodology implies. As Negri shows, Lenin’s theory of the party—both in its system of internal organization (*viz.* democratic centralism) and its relation to the class as a whole (*viz.* vanguardism)—is only adequate to a particular technical composition of labor. The relevance of the party form outside of its initial context cannot, therefore, be guaranteed (and, indeed, Negri claims in no uncertain terms that, even by the 1970’s, the composition of the class had changed remarkably). Thus he notes at the outset of his study, “The composition of the contemporary working class in struggle and the composition of the entire proletariat have nothing whatsoever to do with the composition of the proletariat of the early twentieth century.”<sup>45</sup>

In its structure, the Leninist party is understood as a paradigmatic organizational expression of the “professional worker”—i.e. of the composition of the class in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this period, craft skills were still well preserved, with capital highly dependent on the technical knowledge of an elite sector of the industrial labor force. The typical demands of this era, which focused on the preservation of skilled work and the implementation of workers' self-management, reflect the particular position of craft workers within the production system. Many of the political formations that emerged in this period also (and not unproblematically) mirrored the hierarchies within the technical composition of the class. As Negri and others in the autonomist tradition have observed, Bolshevism reflected these divisions both in its internal structure and vanguard posture.<sup>46</sup>

The internal organization of the party, with its system of hierarchy and organic specialization, is thus understood to reflect the technical composition of the class within the early 20th century factory system. We might further observe how the detailed division of labor is mirrored in the social division of party functions, and how hierarchies between skilled and unskilled labor (as well as the bifurcation between conception and execution characteristic of the labor process, even in industries with a high percentage of skilled workers) are replicated in the division between central committee (and cadre) members on one hand and the rank-and-file membership on the other. In Lenin's organizational model, then, Negri finds a kind of isomorphism between the form of the factory and that of the party.<sup>47</sup>

Negri further suggests the vanguard position that the party assumes in relation to the proletariat as a whole must be understood to reflect the relative isolation of the industrial working class in pre-revolutionary Russia. The minority status of the advanced sections of the proletariat relative to the peasantry and those involved in small scale production placed a small number of industrial workers at the leading edge of Russia's highly uneven economic development, giving them the objective position of a vanguard in the social formation.<sup>48</sup>

In Negri's reading, Lenin converted this objective position into a political program adequate to the conditions at hand, a program that translated the economic isolation of the industrial working class into a leadership principle and source of strength. As he writes, "Lenin [...] starts from this awareness of determinate class composition and its isolation, confronts it, and reverses this isolation into being vanguard, into an ability to drive the entire movement."<sup>49</sup>

Further discussion of this context is useful. Although there were small pockets of large-scale industry, many other sectors of the Russian economy were, at most, merely formally subsumed under capitalist social relations. While perhaps inflected by wage and commodity forms, the intrinsic features of the labor process and class composition in these sectors remained effectively pre-capitalist. Trotsky's frank comments on the economy of prerevolutionary Russia paint a useful picture of this contradictory situation:

Russia's development is first of all notable for its backwardness. But historical backwardness does not mean a mere retracing of the course of the advanced countries a hundred or two hundred years later. Rather it gives rise to an utterly different 'combined' social formation, in which the most highly developed achievements of capitalist technique and structure are integrated into the social relations of feudal and pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and dominating them, fashioning a unique relationship of classes.<sup>50</sup>

It is this "unique relationship of classes" that underpins, at least in Negri's interpretation, the party's vanguardism. On this he too is worth quoting at length:

*On the one hand*, there is an ongoing process of industrialization and the formation of some class vanguards, which are splitting; *on the other hand*, there is the rest of the country, involved as it is in the difficult labor of exiting semifeudal or precapitalist modes of production, a working class limited but now able to assume and configure, in itself, and by virtue of its contradictory relation with the overall development of society, a concept of organization as a general interpretation of the needs of society as a whole. [...] In this determinate situation, the need for an overall recomposition of development and of the struggle against exploitation cannot be carried forward by a vanguard without an external project and leadership.<sup>51</sup>

Essential in Negri's interpretation of both the party's organizational form and vanguard status is Lenin's effort to appropriate the objective determinations of the class and turn them into mechanisms of subjective power. In each instance an isomorphic relation (a relation of formal similarity) exists between the technical and political composition of labor. It is this method—one based on developing a subversive homology between political and technical composition as they exist within a given social formation—that Negri ultimately affirms in Lenin's work and not any specific organizational model. As he argues at numerous points, the form of class composition that supported the Leninist conception of the party is no longer with us.

In many respects, the labor militancy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the aftershocks of the Russian Revolution itself, forced capital to undertake a thoroughgoing reorganization of production. These changes both broke the power of skilled workers through the managerial and technical reorganization of the labor process and pushed towards a tighter integration between the state and the market. Together they ensured the stability of accumulation and the value-form. Employing the autonomist terminology that Negri favors, these shifts opened the era of the 'mass worker.' In this new composition, Taylorist managerial techniques were combined with a Fordist technical and wage regime and Keynesian macroeconomic regulation. As Hardt and Negri would eventually describe it, this Taylor-Ford-Keynes nexus was "the trinity that would constitute the modern welfare state."<sup>52</sup>

Through these shifts, accumulation was preserved and development intensified—this represents an era, from the 1940's through the 1960's, of strong and sustained growth for many industrialized economies. What gradually emerged from this reorganization was an integration of disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms that the autonomists termed the "social factory"—a phrase first used in the 1960's to describe post-War Italian society. In this framework, the factory is still the central site in the extraction of surplus value, but comes increasingly to overcode a range of other social sites, which are structured according to its disciplinary rhythms. As Mario Tronti writes, providing the first formulation of the concept of the social factory, "at the highest level of capitalist development, the social relation is transformed into a moment of the relation of production, the whole of society is turned into an *articulation* of production, that is, the whole of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination to the whole of society."<sup>53</sup>

Through the mediation of what Negri dubbed the "planner state," the factory ceased to be an isolated productive entity.<sup>54</sup> Instead it becomes integrated with a multiplicity of other institutional spaces, including the home, the school, the urban environment, etc.—locales once understood to be relatively isolated in their roles of consumption and reproduction. This, one should note, is not to say the home or the school were ever truly disconnected from capital accumulation. Indeed, many feminist scholars and activists around the autonomist movement in the 1970's argued forcefully that the domestic sphere always

had a crucial role in the *production* of surplus value, and was never simply a space for consumption and reproduction.<sup>55</sup> Rather, the claim is that these spheres existed in relative isolation from the specific disciplinary and regulatory techniques of the factory, techniques that in the era of the mass worker were distributed across an increasingly wide social field. Through Fordist wage-productivity deals, supplemented by the application of social welfare programs and the mobilization of a mass advertising apparatus, consumption was also targeted and planned with the goal of maintaining effective demand and seamlessly integrating the whole circuit of industrial capital.

Negri and others in his milieu saw this integration of society into the circuits of capital as opening a host of new pathways for the direct subversion of capitalist accumulation.<sup>56</sup> This perspective provided a framework for understanding the militancy of the 1960's and 70's, which often went beyond shop-floor actions to encompass new social spaces and subjects. Against a more orthodox view in which these social movements were of secondary importance relative to factory-based politics, the autonomists tended to view these uprisings as themselves expressions of class struggle, capable of immediately attacking the planned circuits of accumulation within the social factory.

In Negri's interpretation, the emergence of this new social terrain undermined the basic distinction between the economic struggle and the political struggle, a distinction upon which much in Lenin's theory of the party was predicated. Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?*—his most programmatic account of the party structure—is, in large part, a critique of economism. In it he suggests that the working class, absent the mediation of the party, will only be capable of pursuing struggles that address immediate conditions in specific workplaces or sectors. They will neither generalize these struggles to arrive at a universal set of demands, nor pose a fundamental challenge to the state.<sup>57</sup> To transition from the immediate economic struggle to the wider political struggle, Lenin suggests, a party is needed.<sup>58</sup> On Negri's reading of the social factory thesis, and in his account of the "planner state," there is a flattening of the distinction between economic and political demands. Because the state is increasingly involved in both direct production and in organizing the terrain of circulation, demands—wherever they arise—take on a general character, fusing the economic and the political. With the state assuming the role of a collective capitalist, even seemingly narrow economic struggles lose their particularity by immediately posing a political challenge to the state and its policy framework. As Negri writes, "The shift from particularity to generality, from economic to political struggle [...], loses the meaning it had in Lenin's thought. [...] Today, in our situation, economic and political struggles are completely identical."<sup>59</sup> While Negri continued to suggest various reformulations of the party concept throughout the 1970's, his analysis of the conjuncture increasingly suggested that the Bolshevik model was definitively superseded.

Negri (often in collaboration with Michael Hardt) has subsequently analyzed further mutations in the nature of work and its organization. Many of these have been described—albeit not without controversy—under the rubrics of "immaterial" and "affective" labor, concepts that depict a composition of the class under a post-Fordist regime of accumulation. That is, they refer to a class composition rooted in a post-industrial context, where the factory no longer has the same centralizing function in society or culture.<sup>60</sup> Forms of technical automation partially facilitated these shifts away from the factory by raising the organic composition of capital in manufacturing and driving investment (in search of higher profit rates) towards the tertiary and quaternary sectors of the economy, where work often takes on an "immaterial" and highly social character.<sup>61</sup>

Negri has further argued that there have been important shifts in the form of the state and the nature of political sovereignty. As early as the mid-1970's he diagnosed the beginnings of a breakdown in the Keynesian "planner state." Negri in part traces this shift

through the changing function of money in the world system. Central in this account is the emergence of a post-Bretton Woods monetary system following Nixon's floating of the dollar and elimination of the direct international convertibility of dollars to gold. In Negri's reading, this monetary shift broke the mediating link between labor time (qua measure of value) and money as a universal equivalent (i.e. as a money commodity in which the labor-values of all other commodities could be validly expressed). This fundamentally challenged the existing regulatory structure, which often depended on the consistency of money as a measure of value and a mechanism for facilitating development.<sup>62</sup> The link between labor and value is further loosened by the growth of the tertiary sector, where, Negri contends, there is a breakdown in the ability to index direct labor time to value output.

Shifts in global monetary policy further facilitated a spatial diffusion of productive activity, leading to a globalized productive order which Hardt and Negri would, by the early 2000's, describe with their concept of "empire." In their account of this global formation, national sovereignty becomes weakened and in part displaced onto transnational financial institutions that take on, along with a growing NGO network, key governmental functions. In their view, then, strategic and organizational perspectives must shift away from the goal of gaining control over the state, and towards the formation of global counter-institutions that can adequately challenge capital within the imperial terrain on which it is operating. This leads to a further distancing from the Leninist perspective, which, in their reading, is irrevocably wedded to the project of seizing state power within a given national milieu.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Reading Dean on the party form***

I will conclude by briefly turning to Jodi Dean's recent work on Lenin and the party in order to highlight what may be a productive point of contrast. In her recent work, Dean has offered a thorough and rigorously synthesized account of the party form and has, at least within the US context, prompted a crucial debate on movement organization and strategy. In the final chapter of *The Communist Horizon*, Dean ends her analysis of the current political situation by suggesting that the Occupy movement organize itself as a party following a broadly Leninist model.<sup>64</sup> Beyond appealing to certain pragmatic gains that she feels could be won through a formalization of the movement's organizational structure, Dean has two arguments for the relevance of the party. The first – and the one she develops most fully in her latest book, *Crowds and Party* – is a transhistorical argument that grounds the necessity of the party in a broadly psychoanalytic account of subject formation. Here the party-class relation is essentially analogized to the therapeutic encounter between analyst and patient, and the transference dynamics found therein.<sup>65</sup> There is, however, a second (but somewhat less fully developed) historical argument for the party in which Dean suggests that the party is the model of political organization most appropriate to the contemporary form of capitalism, which she refers to as "communicative capitalism."

Dean's main argument in support of the party is a highly formal one. It depends, at least in certain key respects, on the transposition of a Lacanian account of subject formation into the sphere of group identification and the psychodynamics of crowds. Her suggestion, in essence, is that the party has a crucial recognitive function in the formation of "the people" qua political subject. That is, for the people to be constituted and recognize themselves in their actions, the party is needed. More precisely, on Dean's model, the party mediates a passage between "the crowd" and "the people." Here the former names a kind of unformed social mass, characterized by spontaneous egalitarian inclinations and a generalized desire for collectivity, while the latter describes a political subject that is reflexively grounded – in the sense of having an account of itself and its past actions – and

oriented towards the achievement of certain political goals.<sup>66</sup> As a subjectivating mechanism, the party's action is largely retroactive. In Dean's formulation, the spontaneous actions of the crowd remain politically ambivalent until the party declares, *ex post facto*, the action to have been an action of "the people" in pursuit of a given political end. Only at this point do "the people" emerge and recognize themselves. As Dean writes, "The people as subject is neither crowd nor party but between them, in the overlap of anticipation and retroactive determination with respect to the political process."<sup>67</sup> She continues: "Because the party looks for them, the people are found."<sup>68</sup>

As was noted, the subjectivation of "the people" by the party, and the mode of recognition it facilitates, is described largely through a psychoanalytic model of transference. Thus Dean argues, "Transference contributes to a theory of the party in this precise sense of a 'mode of access to what is hidden in the unconscious.' The party is a form that accesses the discharge that has ended, the crowd that has gone home, the people who are not there but exert a force nonetheless. It is thus a site of transferential relations."<sup>69</sup>

By way of comparison, we may simply note that the grounding of Dean's account in a de-contextualized picture of subject formation (here figured in psychoanalytic terms) places it at some distance from Negri's work and the historical considerations that orient it. Given this, it is unsurprising that in his most recent co-authored work with Michael Hardt, he has explicitly rejected this type of argument for, among other reasons, being rooted in "dogmatic psychoanalytic assumptions about group formation, which we do not share."<sup>70</sup>

Given their divergent positions on the formal conditions of subject formation (as well as on the proper subject of the political), a more productive point of comparison may be found in Dean's historical arguments. Here too, however, we find opposed approaches to the party and its historical determination.

On the basis of Negri's framework, as sketched above, Dean's historical arguments will appear paradoxical. On one hand, Dean makes an empirical case for the emergence of a new regime of capital—one characterized by the increasing valorization of communicative and affective labor, the displacement of Fordist managerial models, and the blurring of work-life divisions—on the other hand, however, she appeals to a political form conceived under a markedly different set of social-productive conditions. At first glance, then, it seems that we are given a picture in which capital has an inner historicity but labor's forms of political composition do not.

While one might defend the adequacy of the Leninist model with reference to what has remained relatively constant in the organization of capital, this is not Dean's approach. Her argument takes a different logical form as she suggests that the party is needed precisely because of what differentiates it structurally from the dominant elements of contemporary production. Here we might note that her critique of Occupy is that it too closely parallels the organizational and cultural forms of communicative capitalism: "[Occupy] tends to be characterized by diversity, horizontality, individuality, inclusivity, and openness [...]. That these attributes also apply to the global networks of communicative capitalism, that they are celebrated by advertisers and invoked as best practices for efficient corporations, tends to be left unsaid."<sup>71</sup>

Against this formal continuity between communicative capitalism and those movements that have emerged in opposition to it, Dean proposes a political structure (the party) that represents an inversion of this regime of production.<sup>72</sup> The logic here is one of negation. Where communicative capitalism is, at least by her own description, diverse, horizontal, and inclusive, Dean offers a model of political leadership that is more tightly centralized and assumes a vanguardist posture. In her account, then, the party appears not only as the

organizational form that can best sustain a truly collective mode of subject formation, but it is also the only one that can break with existing models of capitalist organization.

This point bears on Dean's critique of Hardt and Negri's work. In her view, their concept of the "multitude," with its internal diversity, a-centric structure, and commitment to political immediacy, fails to register as a sufficiently *antagonistic* subject vis-à-vis global capital. The multitude, on her reading, is not only too diffuse in its political constitution, but also too inclusive, "the concept includes too much—everyone in fact and the cost of this inclusion is antagonism. Rather than labor against capital, have against have-nots, the 99 percent against the 1 percent, we have a multitude of singularities combining and recombining in mobile, fluid, communicative, and affective networks."<sup>73</sup>

Dean similarly takes issue with a perceived spontaneism in Hardt and Negri's account. This, she contends, follows from their tendency to view resistance as an organic outgrowth of capital's development, emerging in an unmediated fashion from within the sinews of capitalism (and the class relation) itself.<sup>74</sup> Dovetailing her aforementioned claim about antagonism, then, Dean argues that in relying on the spontaneous emergence of a counter-subject to capital (*viz.* the multitude), Hardt and Negri tend to downplay the ruptural quality of a properly anti-capitalist and anti-systemic politics. Dean's embrace of the party form, therefore, is rooted in a perspective that suggests a sufficiently antagonistic mode of political subjectivation requires an organizational apparatus that intervenes from a position of exteriority with respect to capital. Anything short of this will be too contaminated by the political and economic structures of the present, and thus unable to break sufficiently from it.

These points shed further light on Dean's turn to the party as the preferred organizational vehicle for contemporary social struggle. The historical specificity of the party form registers in Dean's account, but in an unintuitive way: she implicitly acknowledges the historical particularity of the party in so far as she affirms its asynchronicity with respect to the current conjuncture. In a loose sense, it is this asynchronous—or even anachronistic—character of the Leninist organizational schema that makes it relevant. In her argument, the party is a desirable social form because it breaks with the organizational contours of the present, and thus can constitute itself as an antagonistic and collective force. If Negri's reading of Lenin is correct, however, the party has this character because it mirrors a set of conditions that have been historically superseded in the long passage from early industrial capitalism to what Dean calls "communicative capitalism".

On Negri's account, Leninism (or more precisely, the shockwaves set off by the October Revolution and the international adoption of the Bolshevik model) itself prompted capital to modify the technical composition of labor that gave adequacy to the party form. For him, Lenin's success makes Leninism impossible to repeat. This is something Negri notes throughout his study. Thus Dean's endorsement of the party in the absence of the historical conditions that gave rise to and nurtured it appears to be an inversion of the Leninist method.

Perhaps more significantly, it is not clear that the current context can support a return to a past model. The political and institutional cultures that grounded the party's organizational routines have been largely eroded. In this regard it is worth noting that while recent movements have encountered significant limitations on their ability to endure and generalize their demands, attempts to straightforwardly repeat the Leninist project have also been largely unsuccessful. In spite of efforts by many talented and committed party organizers, Bolshevik style party formations have found relatively little uptake among either workers or movement activists over the past decades. Absent a rich and organic connection to the movement, and ultimately to the working class, these party



formations have often drifted towards sectarianism and bureaucratic deformation. Their small scale and isolation have also created structural limitations on their ability to formulate adequate strategic perspectives, and thus to provide effective leadership. The reason for these failures, however, is not a lack of effort from party organizers, or a simple absence of subjective will, but the structural inadequacy of the Leninist model vis-à-vis the composition of the class.<sup>75</sup>

My reading of Dean has attempted to reveal a tension in her work. Her solution to the problem of organization has a Leninist content, but does not derive it on the basis of a Leninist method. It turns to the party, but does so in a way that is, if not ahistorical, at least inverts the relations of historical determination that, Negri argues, informed how the party's leadership function and organizational structure were conceived. Rather than proceeding by a simple negation, we find in Lenin a kind of isomorphism between the organizational form of the party and the contours of capitalist production within a particular historical period.

Viewed in this way, Negri's approach to organization is one that points to the historical potentialities opened by new organizational forms, rather than proceeding by way of a simple inversion of hegemonic structures. It is clear, then, that Negri's analysis precludes any straightforward reproduction of the Leninist party. As we have seen, the party's victories modified the ground on which it thrived. For Negri, therefore, the Leninist method forbids the repetition of the Leninist model.

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## Notes

1. By way of example, we can observe the exchanges on the party form that are featured in the Fall 2013 issue of *Theory and Event* and the Fall 2014 issue of *The South Atlantic Quarterly*—both guest edited by Jodi Dean. As well as Dean's recent works, *The Communist Horizon* and *Crowds and Party*. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (New York: Verso, 2012); Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (New York: Verso, 2016). [↗](#)
2. Antonio Negri, *Factory of Strategy: Thirty-Three Lessons on Lenin*, trans. Arianna Bove (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). [↗](#)
3. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek, eds., *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010). Bruno Bosteels, "The Actuality of Communism" (London: Verso, 2014). Dean, *The Communist Horizon*. Dean, *Crowds and Party*. [↗](#)
4. Gavin Walker, "The Body of Politics," *Theory and Event* 16, no. 4 (2013). [↗](#)
5. Gavin Walker, "The Body of Politics." [↗](#)
6. Jason Smith, "Contemporary Struggles and the Question of the Party: A Reply to Gavin Walker," *Theory and Event* 16, no. 4 (2013). [↗](#)
7. Jason Smith, "Contemporary Struggles and the Question of the Party." [↗](#)
8. On the idea of an ahistorical kernel of the political, See Slavoj Žižek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism?" in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000), 111; Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 509. See also the discussion in Bruno Bosteels, "The Actuality of Communism," 270. [↗](#)
9. Jason Smith, "The Politics of the Street: Commune and Party in the Age of Riots," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (2014): 699. [↗](#)
10. Joshua Clover and Aaron Benanav, "Can Dialectics Break BRICS?," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (2014); Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "The Materiality of

11. Clover and Benanav, "Can Dialectics Break BRICS?," 754. [↗](#)
12. Clover and Benanav, "Can Dialectics Break BRICS?," 745. Clover and Benanav further emphasize that the party form is wedded to a project of managing economic development through the state-mediated empowerment of the industrial working class. They argue, however, that such a project is now anachronistic. Echoing Marx's arguments in the *Grundrisse*, they suggest that the developmental dynamics of capital have made direct proletarian labor increasingly superfluous from the perspective of producing material wealth, even if the enduring character of the value-form continues, in a contradictory dynamic, to posit direct labor-time as the sole measure of that wealth. In light of this, they suggest that the only viable anti-capitalist project entails the abolition of proletarian labor, and of the role of labor in mediating the distribution of use-values. Clover and Benanav, "Can Dialectics Break BRICS?," 747. [↗](#)
13. Mezzadra and Neilson, "The Materiality of Communism," 787. [↗](#)
14. Peter D. Thomas, "The Communist Hypothesis and the Question of Organization," *Theory and Event* 16, no. 4 (2013). For a wider overview of the debate on the party among the Italian New Left, see Steve Wright, "A Party of Autonomy?," in Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha, ed., *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005); Michael Hardt, "Into the Factory: Negri's Lenin and the Subjective Ceasura (1968-73)," in Timothy S. Murphy and Abdul-Karim Mustapha, ed., *The Philosophy of Antonio Negri: Resistance in Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 2005). [↗](#)
15. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 5. [↗](#)
16. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 13. [↗](#)
17. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 17. [↗](#)
18. As Marta Harnecker writes, "To designate this historically determined social reality, we use the concept of social formation. This concept refers, as we have seen, to a concrete, complex, impure reality, like all reality; to distinguish it from the concept of mode of production which refers to an abstract, pure, 'idea' object." Marta Harnecker, "Social Formation, Mode of Production, Political Conjunction," N.d., <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/periodicals/theoretical-review/tr-17-3.pdf>. [↗](#)
19. As Lenin writes in "What the 'Friends of the People' Are and How They Fight the Social Democrats": "{the concept of the social formation} made it possible to proceed from the description of social phenomena (and their evaluation from the standpoint of an ideal) to their strictly scientific analysis, which isolates, let us say by way of example, that which distinguishes one capitalist country from another and investigates that which is common to all of them... This hypothesis for the first time made a scientific sociology possible..." Lenin quoted in Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 16. [↗](#)
20. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 19. [↗](#)
21. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 45. [↗](#)
22. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 9. [↗](#)
23. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 10. [↗](#)
24. Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Edinburgh; Leeds: AK Press, 2000), 67. [↗](#)
25. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 34. [↗](#)

26. As Negri notes, “the concept of class composition is formed on parameters that refer both to the productive process and to the political experience of the class.” Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 142. [↗](#)
27. Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London; Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002), 3. [↗](#)
28. Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism* (University of Illinois Press, 1999), 66; Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 78. [↗](#)
29. Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, 67. [↗](#)
30. Borrowing a trope usually invoked to describe Kant’s radical overturning of existing views on epistemology, Yann Moulier describes this as the autonomists’ “Copernican inversion of Marxism.” Yann Moulier, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*, by Antonio Negri, (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2005), 19. [↗](#)
31. Mario Tronti, “Lenin In England,” 1964, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/it/tronti.htm>. [↗](#)
32. Mario Tronti, “Social Capital,” *Telos* 1973, no. 17 (September 21, 1973): 98–121. [↗](#)
33. Mario Tronti, “Factory and Society,” 1962, <https://operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com/2013/06/13/factory-and-society/>. [↗](#)
34. Those offering a transhistorical account of technical development often do so by documenting an intersection of the two aforementioned variables (see, for example, G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, Expanded edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 135.) In Cohen’s work, the technical development of productive forces is given unambiguous explanatory priority over other factors in social and economic life. Driven by a set of anthropological invariants, it is claimed that technologies develop more or less *independently* of other aspects of social life, aspects that become, at least in this account, so many *dependent* variables with respect to the latter. As Raniero Panzieri writes, critiquing formulations of this kind from an autonomist perspective, “new characteristic features assumed by capitalist organization are thus mistaken for stages of development of an objective ‘rationality.’” Raniero Panzieri, “The Capitalist Use of Machinery,” 1961, <http://libcom.org/library/capalist-use-machinery-raniero-panzieri>. [↗](#)
35. When Gilles Deleuze insists that “machines are social before being technical” he captures a similar idea. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand, 1st edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 34. [↗](#)
36. Raniero Panzieri, “Surplus Value and Planning: Notes on the Reading of Capital,” 1961, <http://libcom.org/library/surplus-value-planning-raniero-panzieri>. [↗](#)
37. Karl Marx, *Capital VI* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976): 563. [↗](#)
38. We might note that, for Marx, market-mediated competition provides an additional imperative for technological development under capitalism. The autonomists, however, have relatively little to say about this. [↗](#)
39. Guido Baldi, “Theses on Mass Worker and Social Capital,” *Radical American* 6, no. 1 (1972): 3–21; Harry Cleaver, “The Inversion of Class Perspective,” in *Open Marxism Vol II: Theory and Practice.*, ed. Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, and Kosmas Psychopedis (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 113–114. [↗](#)
40. A note of warning is in order. As Sergio Bologna—one of the innovators of this line of theorizing—cautioned, the cycle of struggle concept can function like a “picklock that

- opens all doors,” being all too easily reduced to an intellectual schema under which complex historical dynamics are neatly subsumed (Bologna quoted in Wright, *Storming Heaven*, 5). Salar Mohandesi further cautions that history does not start over with each cycle of struggle: “historical conjunctures [...] do not wash away everything that preceded them, but instead seem to build upon the past in peculiar ways. The decomposition of a certain kind of class figure is not synonymous with its absolute disintegration.” Salar Mohandesi, “Class Consciousness or Class Composition?,” *Science & Society* 77, no. 1 (January 2013): 93. [↗](#)
41. In documenting this historical sequence, it is typically assumed that, in a given period, a single modality of production is ‘hegemonic’—that it can assert a kind of formal dominance across a wide social space. For example, in their recent work, Hardt and Negri claim “immaterial” production has become hegemonic, imposing its organizational features, cultural attributes, and temporality upon all productive activity (even shifting how forms of industrial and agricultural production are carried out). They caution, however, that hegemony in the technical composition need not necessarily imply leadership in a cycle of political composition. [↗](#)
42. Antonio Negri, *The Politics of Subversion: A Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century*(Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), 78; Nick Witheford, “Autonomist Marxism and the Information Society,” *Capital & Class*18, no. 1 (March 1, 1994): 91-92. [↗](#)
43. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*(New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*(Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011). [↗](#)
44. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 47. [↗](#)
45. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 10. [↗](#)
46. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*; Baldi, “Theses on Mass Worker and Social Capital.” As Sergio Bologna has observed, in other national contexts during this period, council communism emerged and reflected in its emphasis on self-management, “the presence of a labor force inextricably linked to the technology of the working process, with high professional values and a natural inclination to stress their function as producers.” Sergio Bologna, “Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the Workers-Council Movement,” *Telos*1972, no. 13 (October 1, 1972): 6. [↗](#)
47. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 36. [↗](#)
48. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 38. [↗](#)
49. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 11. [↗](#)
50. Leon Trotsky, *Stalin*,(New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1941), 422. [↗](#)
51. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 41-42. [↗](#)
52. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). [↗](#)
53. Tronti, “Factory and Society.” [↗](#)
54. Tronti too suggested that during this period the state was increasingly functioning as a “collective capitalist.” As he writes: “the machinery of the political State tends to ever more identify with the figure of the *collective capitalist*; it is turned ever more into the property of the capitalist mode of production and, as a result, *a function of the capitalist*.” Tronti, “Factory and Society”, <https://operaismoinenglish.wordpress.com/2013/06/13/factory-and-society/>. [↗](#)
55. See, for example, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and The Subversion of the Community*(Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972). Leopoldina

56. Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, 71. [↗](#)
57. As Lenin writes, “The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness {...}” V.I. Lenin, *What is To Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement*, (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 31. [↗](#)
58. Lenin’s emphasis on a formal party of ‘professional revolutionaries’ has been widely critiqued for its elitism. Lars T. Lih’s recent work contextualizing *What is to Be Done?* has, however, problematized this traditional critique of Lenin. Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What is to Be Done? In Context*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008). [↗](#)
59. Negri, *Factory of Strategy*, 43-44. [↗](#)
60. In 2016 over 80% of U.S. jobs were in the service sector (by contrast, 12.6% were in goods-producing areas, including mining, construction, and manufacturing, while 1.5% were in agriculture). These accounted for 79% of U.S. private sector GDP (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Industry Output and Employment Projections to 2018: Table 2.1. Employment by Major Industry Sector,” Monthly Labor Review, November 2009. Available at: [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_201.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_201.htm)). By way of comparison, manufacturing alone accounted for over 32% of U.S. employment at its peak in 1953. The service sector accounts for over 51% of global employment and 65% of global GDP (International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. Available at: [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.srv.empl.zs?year\\_high\\_desc=false](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sl.srv.empl.zs?year_high_desc=false); World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.SRV.TOTL.ZS>). [↗](#)
61. For a survey of how these shifts impacted trade-union politics, see Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1997). Despite the relative growth of the service sector, Moody has cautioned against discounting the political significance of the industrial working class. [↗](#)
62. Antonio Negri, “Crisis of the Planner State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization,” in *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970’s Italy*, ed. Timothy S. Murphy (London: Verso, 2005), 5. [↗](#)
63. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*. [↗](#)
64. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*. [↗](#)
65. Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 184. [↗](#)
66. Dean understands “the people” as “the rest of us”—the part of the population that is constitutively excluded from the dominant order. It is neither a sociological aggregate nor an organic whole. Unlike the people qua “populist totality,” the people, on Dean’s account, lack any essential unity. Dean, *Crowds and Party*. [↗](#)
67. Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 157. [↗](#)
68. Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 158. [↗](#)
69. Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 184. [↗](#)
70. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 44. [↗](#)
71. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 208. An autonomist rejoinder may proceed by pointing out that the modifications in capital’s organizational composition that Dean describes under the rubric of communicative capitalism can themselves be read as a

recuperation of the anti-systemic social movements of the 1960's and 70's. Capital, on this reading, sought to integrate the forms of life and productive practices that characterized the new left (a refusal of factory labor, a valorization of mobility, of intellectual and affective capacities and social cooperation) into a regime of profit. Writing on this period, Hardt and Negri note, "Capital did not need to invent a new paradigm (even if it were capable of doing so) because *the truly creative moment had already taken place*. Capital's problem was rather to dominate a new composition that had already been produced autonomously {...}." Thus, rather than view the emphasis on, for example, participatory decision making as an alien imposition and simple marker of capitalist command, it may instead be viewed as a genuine expressions of popular power and resistance, one that is merely distorted by its subsumption under capitalist social forms. See Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 276. ↗

72. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 16. ↗

73. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, 78. ↗

74. Dean, *Crowds and Party*, 23. ↗

75. Put more simply, it is not clear that we could rebuild the Leninist party, even if such a rebuilding were desirable. To insist on this organizational possibility apart from the economic, political, and cultural terrain on which the party thrived is to risk voluntaristic excess. This is something Negri notes in his work from the 1970's. See Antonio Negri, "Workers Party Against Work," in Timothy S. Murphy, ed., *Books For Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy* (London: Verso, 2005), 56. ↗

 Bio

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Douglas Spielman is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Communication at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. His past work has looked at representations of time in Marx's theory of value. Douglas's current research analyzes the ways in which labor was mobilized as a category of political recognition and right in early modern and modern social thought. He is, in part, concerned with how these usages of the category were impacted by technoscientific developments and discourses.



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